



**State of Tennessee
Department of State
Tennessee State Library and Archives**

**William Neal McGrew
Civil War Diaries, 1861-1862**

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator:

McGrew, William Neal, 1835-1923

Inclusive Dates:

1861-1862

Scope & Content:

Contains three diary volumes written by William Neal (Neely) McGrew during his service in the Confederate Army, from 1861-1862. McGrew wrote that he joined Wheeler's "First Giles Cavalry" on November 20, 1861, and was sworn into service with the Confederate Army in Nashville, Tennessee, on December 9, 1861. Elected as second corporal for his company on December 12, he resigned that position the following month and ran successfully for sergeant. McGrew described training and drills at Camp Weakley near Nashville. Stricken with a "pustule or tumor" that left him sick and unable to talk, he went home to Pulaski on furlough for Christmas week, returning to his company on January 1, 1862.

Wheeler's company became Company A of Lt. Col. William Wallace Gordon's 11th Tennessee Cavalry Battalion on January 8, 1862. McGrew's description of the election of Gordon over Wheeler for the command indicates that he believed Gordon won unfairly.

McGrew witnessed the Nashville funerals of Gen. Felix Zollicoffer and other soldiers. He reported on what he heard about the battles at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, but did not participate in either. On February 12, McGrew returned home to Pulaski on sick leave. Five days later, he described the "gloomy news" that came on the train carrying Governor Isham Harris and his cabinet away from Nashville towards Memphis. According to McGrew, Harris "told the Citizens last night that he would be with them in 10 days to die with them in the Cause of the South."

McGrew rejoined his company in March, noting that his horse was gaunt. They marched through Athens and Decatur, Alabama, through swampy land in bad weather. On March 10, 1862, he wrote that "Playing soldier is now becoming a very disagreeable game but I fear not half as hard as it will yet be."

The company traveled by train to Tuscumbia, Alabama, and then marched to Iuka, Mississippi. McGrew described various maneuvers, pickets, and a "column of cavalry near two miles long" to Corinth on April 3, 1862. He reported on the Battle of Shiloh, the capture of Huntsville, Alabama, on April 10 and various activities around Corinth, Mississippi. McGrew wrote of the presence of Gen. [John?] Adams and the reorganization of his company, which had been combined with Col. Biffle's battalion to form a new regiment. McGrew observed that "there has been other changes in officers but I have not yet learned the changes." On April 30, he noticed "there being some great dissatisfaction in our Regiment as to our field officers, they resigned and run the elections over this morning which resulted in the election of Leut. Col. Biffle as Commanding Colonel."

McGrew chronicled his company's movement in northern Mississippi and West Tennessee, with references to short rations, ill health, and becoming lost in a swamp. On August 30-31, 1862, there was a "considerable brush with the Yanks" near Bolivar, Tennessee. His descriptions include Jackson, Denmark, and LaGrange, Tennessee, the latter serving as the site of his convalescence for several days before finding his camp on September 17, 1862.

The entries for several days in October 1862 have been crossed out, followed by a reference on October 31 to "court martials going on." By November 9, McGrew was back in Holly Springs, Mississippi, reporting that the infantry was in retreat. On November 12, his small force was given a dangerous mission for a "small force of 93 men" near Lumpkin's Mill. The following day, McGrew and "20 from the Reg 1st Tenn Cavalry and 11 others from different commands" were cut off, surrounded, and captured by the Yankees (the 2nd Iowa Cavalry).

As a prisoner of war, McGrew went first to "Hutsonville" [Hudsonville, Mississippi], where he was "treated kindly." His diary contains a list of others imprisoned with him. The Federals transported the prisoners to Holly Springs, Mississippi, and then to LaGrange, Tennessee, where they were housed in a college. From there, they traveled by military railroad car from Cairo, Illinois, to Columbus, Kentucky. They boarded the *Lady Jackson* along with "several hundred of our brother soldiers" bound for Memphis. A few days later, McGrew traveled with other prisoners on board the *Metropolis* to Helena, Arkansas, where they landed among transports and gunboats. He reported that an outbreak of small pox affected two on their ship. On November 27, he watched 26 transports with soldiers moving down the river towards Vicksburg, Mississippi. The next day, McGrew and other prisoners sailed to Vicksburg, where he was paroled on December 2, 1862.

A note about McGrew's regiment: According to *Tennesseans in the Civil War, Part I*, (p. 66) the 6th (Wheeler's) Tennessee Cavalry Regiment was also called the 1st and 2nd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment at various times. It was originally called the 1st Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, but its first colonel was J. B. Biffle, formerly lieutenant colonel of the 2nd Battalion. On muster rolls and paroles, it was referred to as the 1st Tennessee Cavalry Regiment. The Adjutant and Inspector General's Office ordered that it be called the 6th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment on September 12, 1862, in order to avoid confusion. However, it was still often referred to as the 1st, and sometimes as the 1st (6th).

Physical Description/Extent:

1 microfilm reel; 16mm

Accession/Record Group Number:

Mf. 2009

Language:

English

Permanent Location:

Mf. 2009 (available on microfilm only)

Repository:

Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

Administrative/Biographical History

William Neal (Neely) McGrew (1835-1923) was born in Coffee County, Tennessee, but called Prospect, Tennessee, in Giles County, his home. His father was Curry McGrew, originally of Greenville, South Carolina, and his mother was the former Eliza Ann Patton from Tennessee. Neely worked as a bookkeeper for the town of Pulaski, also in Giles County, before the Civil War. He joined Wheeler's First Giles County Cavalry on November 20, 1861, and was mustered into the Confederate Army at Nashville on December 9, 1861. He married Louisa Ruth Whitley on May 15, 1866. She is listed in postwar census reports as Eliza R. McGrew. They had five children: Lena, William, Anna, Addie, and Neely. McGrew served in the Company A, 11th Battalion (Gordon's) Tennessee Cavalry, which became Company K, 6th (Wheeler's) Tennessee Cavalry, during the war. He later became a mechanic. McGrew died June 9, 1923, and is buried at Maplewood Cemetery in Pulaski.

Organization/Arrangement of Materials

Volumes are arranged chronologically: (1) November 20, 1861–May 1862, (2) June 1862–December 15, 1862, and (3) June 4, 1862–July 5, 1862. The third volume appears to be a copy of the first month of the second volume, which is in poor condition. The third volume also contains some poetry and songs.

Conditions of Access and Use

Restrictions on Access:

None

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

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Index Terms

Personal Names:

McGrew, William Neal, 1843-1928
Biffle, Jacob Barnett, 1830-1877
Gordon, William Wallace
Wheeler, James T.
Zollicoffer, Felix Kirk, 1812-1862

Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:

Confederate States of America. Army. Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, 6th
Confederate States of America. Army. Tennessee Cavalry Battalion, 11th

Subjects:

Fort Donelson, Battle of, Tenn., 1862
Corinth (Miss.), Battle of, 1862
Shiloh, Battle of, Tenn., 1862
Military occupation -- Tennessee -- Nashville
Military occupation -- Tennessee -- Memphis

Geographic Names:

Bolivar (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns

Corinth (Miss.) -- History -- Siege, 1862
Denmark (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
Giles County (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
Holly Springs (Miss.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
Huntsville (Ala.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
Iuka (Miss.) -- History -- Siege, 1862
Jackson (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
LaGrange (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
Memphis (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
Nashville (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
Pulaski (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
Rienzi (Miss.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
Ripley (Tenn.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives,
Confederate
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Prisoners and prisons
Vicksburg (Miss.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

Document Types:

Diaries

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition:

The papers were loaned for microfilming on November 17, 2011, during the *Looking Back: The Civil War in Tennessee* digitization project in Athens, Tennessee.

Processing and Administrative Information

Preferred Citation:

William Neal McGrew Civil War Diaries, 1861-1862, Tennessee State Library and Archives

Processing Information:

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Existence and Location of Originals:

Privately owned

Electronic Location and Access:

<http://www.tn.gov/tsla/history/manuscripts/findingaids/mf2009.pdf>

DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Volume
Diary	November 20, 1861–May 1862	1
Diary	June 1862–December 15, 1862	2
Diary	June 4, 1862–July 5, 1862	3